

American Friends Service Committee's  
Michigan Criminal Justice Program  
Testimony against HB 4467  
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Quakers have a long history of involvement in prison reform efforts, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization, has worked for prison reform in various capacities throughout the country since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Our work has always focused on the need for an effective and humane criminal justice system that is focused on rehabilitation and healing over punishment.

For years, we have witnessed the suffering of families and people who get caught up in activities, behaviors and sometimes systems beyond their control and who, in turn, end up living in our prisons and jails.

We find the for-profit prison industry antithetical to one of the principles of the Quaker tradition, recognizing that of God in all human beings. If a corporation's bottom line is dependent on keeping a person caged or under state surveillance, what is the incentive of a company to reduce the prison population, or to work toward more pre-prison services and programs (like drug treatment and comprehensive mental health services in the community) that keep people out of prison to begin with?

Because we know that keeping people out of prison to begin with is the most cost effective step we can take.

In Michigan the American Friends Service Committee's Criminal Justice Program has served as a voice and advocate for people held behind our publicly run prison walls for 26 years.

While we work directly with people incarcerated in Michigan, we understand the various problems that arise for people living in prisons (both public and private prisons) across the country. One of the major issues faced by people incarcerated is access to support networks including family, friends and loved ones.

We see the struggles that occur for families divided by hundreds of miles between a prison and the community of the prisoner's origin. To place a person hundreds if not thousands of miles away from the people who will help support them upon return to their communities is just bad public policy.

And, while the GEO facility in Lake County may be slated to house prisoners from Vermont or California or some other faraway place, the state of MI should not be involved in being corporation conspirators in helping to facilitate this "business" move.

In addition to being against the use of this facility for the housing of out of state prisoners, we ask explicitly that this facility not be used at any time in the future to house prisoners sentenced to the Michigan Department of Corrections for any term of years.

AFSC recognizes the lack of jobs in Lake County and surrounding counties. We understand that people of this community need businesses to set up shop. We cannot stress enough

how unethical it is to rely on the caging of our fellow humans for low-wage jobs for a community that struggles with chronic underemployment. It is well documented that GEO runs institutions with high, high employee turnover. Working in prisons is not easy work. It is hard and takes a toll on people's minds and spirits. Paying someone 10, 12, or 15 dollars an hour to work in a level I or II facility in difficult conditions leads to high turnover and in the long run is exploitive and may actually cause more problems in a community: mental health issues for employees, chronic depression, higher rates of substance abuse, and higher rates of domestic violence.

And then, imagine paying people these same low wages but asking them to work in a level IV or V facility where often the most difficult prisoners with troubling mental health issues and/or complicated behavior histories are housed?

Does this region of Michigan really want this kind of employment for its citizens?

And as we know lower-wage workers, for the most part, are unable to spend their money on leisure and food, so what kind of economic boost will the opening of a private prison really bring to Lake County and the surrounding communities?

Do you as legislators find it your business to help bolster a business plan for corporation that makes profit off of people's suffering?

Giving GEO the okay to house level V prisoners is simply making an out of state corporation a more attractive business prospect for corrections departments around the country to outsource their problems.

We ask the Senate Committee on Judiciary to keep HB 4467 from moving forward: